

SLIPS ON THE STAGE.

"GAGS" AND "LAPSI LINGUI." Unheeded stage-effects have, from the very earliest times, produced consequences of a varied character, yet of more or less importance. They have excited laughter, surprise, indignation, and have occasionally conferred immortality on actors who would not otherwise have belonged, at least permanently, to fame.

"Cateby," eager to do well, went wrong, and missed his text. "My lord," he said, "the name of Richmond is taken! Upon which 'Richard' with humorous gravity upon his face, stepped forward and intimated to the houses—'If what this fellow says be strictly true, and Richmond now be held in duress, the play you see comes suddenly to end. And nothing could be truer than that fact, although it was delivered in blank verse, to fashion which is to the actor sport. But we will not guarantee the consequences of this story. The actors invent here as readily as the members of the Stock Exchange do conundrums.'

Among the traits of stupidity put to the account of actors, by which they are unheeded effects have been produced on the stage, no proof of stupidity than that which distinguished the actor who originally represented 'Lord Burghley' in the 'Cateby.' The names of several plays, and the names of the actors who played in them, are given, each as being the hero of this story, but the only one who is named, or 'Burleigh,' was Irish Moody, far too acute an actor to be suspected for a fool. When Sheridan selected him for the part, the manager declared that Moody would be sure to commit some ridiculous error, and ruin the effect. The author protested that he had no intention of making an actor to be suspected for a fool, and, according to the fashion of the times, a wager was laid, and Sheridan hurried to the performer of the part to give him such instructions as should render any mistake beyond possibility. 'Lord Burghley' had nothing to say, merely to sit a while, and then, as the stage directions informed him, and Sheridan impressed it on his mind, 'Lord Burghley' comes forward, pauses near 'Dangle,' shakes his head, and says, 'I have been instructed by the manager so to act as to win the wager; understood the direction, he said, and could not err. At night he came forward, did pass near 'Dangle,' shook his head, and went solemnly on. Now, if this version of the story be correct, Moody must have been instructed by the manager so to act as to win the wager; for him; he having backed Moody on the strength of his stupidity. On the other hand, if the story be really historical, the incident must have happened at rehearsal, and Moody must have substituted for some inefficient player originally cast for the character.

At this period great liberties were often taken by actors with audiences; and not very long before this an unheeded stage effect occurred which has been sublimely gaily mentioned in the part of a couple of players, Mrs. Griffiths' 'Patonic Wife' was dragging its slow length along, wearying those on the stage as well as the audience in front. At the end of the third act the performers grew more impatient than the audience, and Holland and Powell, two respectable players, thrust their heads out from opposite sides of the stage when the "drop" was down, and earnestly appealed to the house to stop the piece by demanding if it were not a comedy. The scene is incredible, but the circumstance belongs to stage history; but nobler plays than the above lady's have been in peril.

Although George III once said that Lord Thurlow might as well play "Hamlet" as Cooke, Cooke, George Frederick often acted the part, out of London. Reynolds tells us that when Cooke was once playing this part in Ireland, he was seen sharpening his sword before the fencing-match, and gave as a reason to curious inquirers, "I and Mr. Laertes will fight in reality, and settle our little disputes." The "young lady" who took interest in "Laertes" informed him of the peril in which he stood; and accordingly, when the fencing-match came on, the son of "Polonius" rushed in on the heels of Denmark, seized him in his arms, and with a back fall, planted his knee upon him, and looked from the astonished George Frederick to the astonished audience with the proud air of a man who had introduced a new reading, and had been remarkably successful.

Moderation or reserve were things not to be expected, generally, from George Frederick Cooke, though he could practise both when the gentlemanly humor was upon him, or when it otherwise suited his purpose. He on one occasion consented to give from his own pocket to play "Cato," for the benefit of a poor actor, a quondam friend, in a country theatre. It was the character which Cooke played worse than any of those for which he was ill-situated, yet which he would play. The tragedy is not one that is likely to be well handled by a provincial company; and on the occasion in question it met with supremely ill usage at very incompetent hands. All the appointments were bad, and what little of the text was remembered was delivered with many variations and a comic indifference to the rules of pronunciation. Cooke, however, was good-natured and intolerant. He swore a little, laughed a good deal, and bore with all, more or less patiently, till there was a general breakdown in the scene, owing to a universal forgetfulness of the text, which the most skilful of prompters could by no means remedy. This does not imply that Cooke's patience lasted long. In fact, he was only tolerant or amused while he looked on the scene, and when the scene broke down, he was the most skilful of prompters could by no means remedy.

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